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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000650

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

AF/S FOR B. WALCH
DRL FOR N. WILETT
G/TIP FOR R. YOUSEY AND J. SIGMON
STATE PASS TO DOL FOR S. HALEY

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KTIP](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#) [AO](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: ZIMBABWEAN WORKERS RECOUNT TRAFFICKING TO ANGOLA

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) At least seven Zimbabwean men were recently trafficked to Angola to work on a construction project after they answered a job advertisement posted by a Chinese-managed company in Harare. On arrival in Angola, the men discovered that the recipient Chinese-managed company was not prepared to provide the men with contracts, freedom of movement, or adequate food, clean water, or shelter. With the help of a Zimbabwean diplomat and a Zimbabwean businessman in Angola, six of the men have returned to Zimbabwe after some spent three months in unsanitary, forced labor conditions. One remains in Luanda, hoping that the company's promises of remuneration will come through. Because Zimbabwe does not have an anti-trafficking law, four of the men are pursuing a case against the Chinese recruiting company through the Zimbabwean government's Ministry of Labor. END SUMMARY.

Chinese Company Recruits Skilled Laborers

12. (SBU) On August 4, 2009, we interviewed three of seven Zimbabwean men who were recently trafficked to Angola after they answered an advertisement recruiting construction workers for a project in Angola. We spoke with a project manager, welder, and driver. Other victims included a mechanic, an electrician, a builder, and a driver. The project manager, Shingai Siraha, has become the de facto leader of this group of trafficking victims.

13. (SBU) All of the men responded to advertisements posted in Harare around October or November 2008 directing them to Costam Investments, located in downtown Harare. The workers were interviewed by a Chinese man, Mr. Li (hereafter referred to as the recruiter), and two Zimbabwean men known as Banda and Baurain. When Costam Investments advised the workers they would be hired for construction jobs in Angola, they took the workers' passports to process visas and work permits. Initially, the recruiter promised the men that they would leave within a month, but the promises dragged on until the men finally left in two groups in late March and mid-April, 2009.

14. (SBU) The Angolan embassy in Harare processed tourist visas for the men, at least two of which were signed by the same consular officer. The men never completed visa application forms but submitted photos to Costam Investments staff who completed the paperwork on their behalf. The recruiter promised the men that they would receive work permits and contracts on arrival in Luanda. The recruiter advised the men to tell Angolan immigration officials they were traveling on vacation to visit friends. Four visas were processed in the name of the sending company, Costam Investments, and three were processed in the name of the receiving company in

"We didn't even have a toilet"

15. (SBU) The three men we met arrived in Angola on April 17 and were taken to the local company, Gindungo Comercio Geral, run by the recruiter's uncle, also known as Mr. Li (hereafter referred to as the receiver). When they reached the company, they met four Zimbabweans who had arrived two weeks earlier. The receiver informed all seven men that he had heard that Zimbabweans were suffering and willing to work in any conditions. Five of the Qsuffering and willing to work in any conditions. Five of the Zimbabwean workers asked to leave immediately; two others agreed to stay, hoping the receiver would fulfill his promises of improved conditions. The receiver told the workers that he needed to hold their passports to make travel arrangements to facilitate their return.

16. (SBU) The men were forced to stay at the company's construction site and not allowed to leave. They were not supposed to have cell phones, but a couple of the men managed to conceal their phones. They built their own shelter from scrap corrugated aluminum at the site. Because the facility lacked a toilet, the men were forced to sneak out the fence and find bushes nearby. The receiver brought them food every few days, although it was often rotten and inadequate. Three Chinese men also living at the site had a shelter with electricity and a separate, clean water tank. The seven Zimbabwean men (most in their 30s and 40s) also reported that there were five Angolans who were also held in similar forced labor conditions at the site. They believed these young men were between the ages of 16 and 20 and had been trafficked from rural Angola.

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The twelve forced laborers did not have enough blankets or mosquito nets.

17. (SBU) Fortunately, the trafficking victims met a Zimbabwean businessman, Mr. Mlambo, during their flight to Luanda. Using one of their contraband cell phones, the men managed to secretly call Mlambo to seek his help in contacting the Zimbabwean embassy for assistance. On April 21, Siraha and four others went to the Zimbabwean embassy and met with the financial counselor, Misheck Makuyana, who proved helpful throughout their ordeal. Makuyana provided the men with a letter from the Zimbabwean Ambassador asking Gindungo to provide them with return flights to Zimbabwe.

18. (SBU) On April 23, the company purchased tickets to allow three of the men to return to Harare, none of whom were paid for the work they performed in Luanda. The receiver claimed the flight was full, and the rest of the men could travel the following week. After several subsequent weeks of delays and excuses, Siraha again contacted Makuyana on June 10 to request additional help in leaving, as the company claimed to not have funds to repatriate the workers. Makuyana again contacted the company, and on June 12 the rest of the men returned to Zimbabwe with air tickets purchased by Gindungo. Makuyana also advised the men how to pursue their case against the recruiting company, Costam Investments, on arrival in Harare through the labor courts. This group of victims did not see other Zimbabwean trafficking victims in Angola. However, one victim overheard the receiver comment that soon they would have a "village" of 150-200 Zimbabweans in Angola.

19. (SBU) One Zimbabwean, a builder, remains in Luanda. Siraha told us the builder was desperate for cash to support his family and did not want to return home empty-handed. He chose to stay in Luanda, hoping things would improve. Siraha and the other victims are unsure if the Zimbabwean embassy is aware that he has stayed in Luanda. They also explained that the builder's tourist visa has now expired. The victims believe Angola fines visitors who overstay their visas \$300 per day, and they believe this threat will further entrap their colleague who stayed behind.

Victims Seek Recourse Through Zim Labor Court

¶10. (SBU) Because Zimbabwe does not have comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation, the men have sought recourse through the Ministry of Labor, where they are seeking compensation from Costam Investments. The men are asking to be paid for lost wages between November and June and additional damages. In an initial hearing on June 22, the Labor Officer responsible for the case appeared to side with the victims and asked them to submit additional detailed documents to claim damages against Costam. After June 22, however, representatives of Costam failed to attend hearings on three occasions, and the Labor Officer became increasingly unresponsive.

¶11. (SBU) When the victims realized the Labor Officer was not documenting their case, they sought help from the local office of Transparency International (TI), which helped them secure an appointment with the Permanent Secretary, the top bureaucrat in the Labor Ministry, on July 24. In that meeting, the Permanent Secretary berated the Labor Officer for improperly handling the case and not documenting events. Since that meeting, the case appears to be moving in the right direction. The men now have a hearing scheduled for August 7, and summons have been issued to all parties, including Costam. Their initial visit to TI led to referrals to the International Organization for Migration, Interpol, the U.S. Embassy, and local pro bono legal and medical assistance.

COMMENT

¶12. (SBU) This case highlights the vulnerability of Zimbabweans to trafficking schemes and the difficulties victims face in seeking justice against traffickers. In particular, Zimbabwe's large pool of skilled, unemployed laborers makes for easy prey for those seeking to exploit workers' desperation. These men are extraordinarily fortunate that they met a Zimbabwean businessman living in Angola who led them to the helpful diplomat at the Zimbabwean embassy in Luanda. Without their quick-acting compatriots, the men would probably still be forced laborers. In all likelihood, other Zimbabweans have been trafficked by the same group of Chinese to other sites in Angola or elsewhere.

¶13. (SBU) Given Zimbabwe's recent Tier 3 ranking in the Trafficking

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in Persons report, we have been actively liaising with government officials on the urgent need for anti-trafficking legislation and better support systems to help victims. Government officials in both major political parties agree there is a need for such legislation, and we are using this ongoing case as an example of the kinds of victims improved government action could help. END
COMMENT.

¶14. (U) U.S. Embassy Luanda has cleared this cable.

DHANANI